

Government Orders

I remind the member for Hamilton—Wentworth that in spite of his comments about aboriginal issues, and the fact that he seems to think that this bill does so much, Motions Nos. 18, 19 and 20 were turned down by the government. Motion No. 18 says, “Broadcasting services reflecting aboriginal cultures and representative native languages shall be provided where numbers warrant”. It was defeated. “Native cultures and representative native languages should be provided” was defeated. Motion No. 20, proposed by the New Democratic Party also relating to the protection and preservation of an aboriginal presence was defeated.

We can say many things but in our hearts every one of us knows the question is: is there a commitment to national unity, is there a willingness to stand up and be counted, is there a willingness to say, “This is what we want as Canadians”? I am afraid not, not in this bill, and that is very sad.

Mr. Guy H. Arseneault (Restigouche—Chaleur): Mr. Speaker, it has been a long day for us all and I wish to thank you for providing me with this opportunity to participate in the third reading debate of Bill C-40. As you are aware, Mr. Speaker, this bill comes to us as a result of the Caplan-Sauvageau commission’s report, as well as four reports tabled by the Standing Committee on Communications and Culture.

The purpose of the bill is to replace the 1968 Broadcasting Act, a law which no longer reflects the rapidly evolving nature of the communications industry. However, the bill is seriously flawed. As we have seen in the report stage debate, it is in bad need of amendments. Indeed, Bill C-40, if passed will seriously undermine Canada’s national fabric and it will help divide and balkanize Canadians at a crucial moment in our history. Moreover, our broadcasting system will become one more casualty in the long list of Tory blunders. In fact, the new definition of broadcasting, contained in clause 2 of the bill, is defined broadly to include the transmission and reception of programs, other than by means of radiocommunication. In other words, the hard-wire or closed-circuit transmissions previously considered to be under provincial jurisdiction will now be covered by the new broadcasting law.

• (2100)

As well, undertakings by cable companies or broadcasters will be divided into programming and non-programming functions. This is a rejection of conventional legal practice which has regarded such undertakings as indivisible. You will surely agree, Mr. Speaker, that this change promises to be a source of major headaches in the future.

The 1968 Broadcasting Act required that the CBC, and I quote, “contribute to the development of national unity”. We have heard a lot about that clause today and over the past days in debate. Unfortunately, all reference to this has been eliminated from Bill C-40. As Liberals, we believe that the developing of a national personality, identity, and consciousness are best brought about with the help of broadcasting agency, mandated to contribute to the development of national unity.

Given its geographic, demographic and cultural characteristics, Canada needs strong national institutions such as the CBC to weave all the regions and all the diverse participants in our society into a unified network. It is obvious that Canada could never have become a distinct, sovereign, and prosperous nation from coast to coast had we not had government involvement and institutions to help offset the permanent attraction of the United States.

As I said during the report stage debate, this country is the fruit of the efforts of our forefathers to build a nation, from east to west. To overcome the daunting task of uniting the country, successive governments gave us a national railway, a post office, a national radio and television network, a national airline, as well as a variety of measures which contributed to the development of the Canada that we know and the Canada that we love. A rapid overview of the institutions which I have just mentioned reveals nothing but the scorched earth which the Tories have left behind them.

Another serious flaw of Bill C-40—one which I might add also undermines national unity—is the creation of separate standing committees on English and French-language broadcasting at the CBC. The result of this change will only serve to isolate Canadians from each other. Furthermore, it is contrary to clause 3(1)(i) which confirms that the CBC programming should, and I quote, “contribute to shared national consciousness and identity”.